



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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Fifteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 296th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 23 January 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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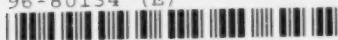
CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE
CONVENTION (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Answers to questions on the combined initial and second periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/1-2 and Supplement)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Varnavidou (Cyprus) took a place at the Committee table.
2. Ms. VARNAVIDOU (Cyprus) conveyed her Government's apologies at the fact that the combined initial and second periodic reports of Cyprus (CEDAW/C/CYP/1-2 and Supplement) had not covered all the issues on which the Committee had requested information. There were stylistic inconsistencies in the reports because they were the collective work of several ministries, and she expressed regret that the work of the already overburdened Committee had been increased by the last-minute submission of the Supplement.
3. In response to the request for more detailed population statistics, she said that in 1994, the Government-controlled area of Cyprus had had a population of 633,900. No figures were available for the occupied area; prior to the 1974 occupation, Turkish Cypriots had accounted for 18 per cent of the population, but after the occupation many of them had fled the island in order to escape the illegal regime. However, some 19,000 settlers had been sent to Cyprus from Anatolia in order to change the island's demographic composition.
4. The Government shared the Committee's concern for the rights of women living in the occupied area where, according to available information, women's rights were not given sufficient attention. Since the Government had no access to that area, it was unable to help Cypriot women there, although Cypriot legislation theoretically applied to them and they would be able to benefit from those laws once the occupation ended. Cypriot women's organizations had attempted to meet with those women, but the occupying Government had not permitted it and meetings had been possible only abroad, most recently in Beijing.
5. With regard to the question of whether women could invoke the articles of the Convention in court, she said that under article 169 of the National Constitution, all women could now invoke the Convention, even though domestic legislation did not as yet provide for such an option.
6. With regard to the powers of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, she noted that some information had been provided in the Supplement. The Machinery consisted of a large number of women's voluntary organizations and trade unions, whose members were unsalaried, and of salaried government employees. The Government supported the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, which was responsible for the Machinery, and subsidized the non-governmental organizations associated with it. The Secretariat of the Machinery was not a separate

department within the Ministry; ministerial staff were seconded to it, as required, and it did not have its own budget.

7. The representatives of ministries and departments were no longer permanent members of the Council for Women's Rights, but they participated in it whenever issues were discussed which came within their areas of competence and interest. That change had been part of a move to reduce the size of the Council, in order to increase its flexibility and effectiveness as a pressure group for women's organizations. Subcommittees on specific issues allowed for the participation of representatives of other ministries; moreover, since the Council came under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, it had access to the Council of Ministers. The functions of the Council for Women's Rights were primarily advisory; it proposed amendments to existing laws, and any new legislation which concerned women was submitted to it for comment, even if it had been proposed by another ministry. Furthermore, representatives of the National Machinery were generally invited by the Government to comment on all issues under discussion. The success of the Machinery was evident in the many new laws which had improved the situation of women in the family and in the workplace.

Article 4

8. With regard to temporary special measures to increase women's participation in politics, the civil service and the labour market, a special committee, composed of representatives of the major political parties and women's organizations, had been established in an attempt to increase the number of women candidates for the upcoming elections and, should such candidates come forward, to publicize and support them. Quota systems for political parties were not being discussed for the moment. While the participation of women in Parliament remained very low, there had been some improvement in women's participation at the local level and it was hoped that women with local experience would later run for Parliament.

9. There had never been any gender-based salary discrimination in the civil service; all positions in the public sector were open to both sexes and were advertised as such. Women's level of participation was unsatisfactory but improving; for example, 16 of the 36 professional officers in the planning bureau were women.

10. Education played a major role in changing women's career choices, and career and vocational guidance services were now staffed by qualified counsellors. The Ministry of Education publicly encouraged women to enter the technical professions, and it was expected that future improvements in the education system would gradually reduce the gender gap in the workplace.

Article 5

11. With regard to the role of the Government, the National Machinery and the women's movement in changing social attitudes, she said that Cyprus had nearly completed the reform of its legal system and had eliminated most legal distinctions between the sexes. The country's new development plan emphasized the importance of changing traditional attitudes and stereotypes which prevented

women from taking their rightful place in society. The Government encouraged and supported educational programmes and awareness campaigns, which were usually run by the National Machinery or by individual or non-governmental organizations. Special attention was given to educating rural women by holding meetings and disseminating information.

12. With regard to the problem of violence against women, Cyprus was particularly proud of a new law which had been approved in 1994 and was now in force. The law gave fuller protection to the victims of violence, who were usually women and children, and, by increasing the penalties for violent crime in the home, sent a clear message that such acts were unacceptable. There were, as yet, few available statistics on the implementation of the new law, but the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence had seen an increase in the reporting of cases of domestic violence. There were no data available on the sentences imposed for such crimes, but the next periodic report would provide statistics. The new law acknowledged the possibility of rape within marriage, speeded up trials in cases of domestic abuse and allowed for the issue of an injunction prohibiting the accused from remaining in the marital home, even if he or she was the legal owner. It also appointed family counsellors to advise victims and report cases of domestic violence.

13. On the question of whether centres were available for victims of domestic violence, she said that the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Domestic Violence operated a crisis centre and a shelter for battered women, both funded by the Government, and offered first aid, counselling, legal assistance and a helpline.

14. There was a need to involve the mass media in the task of changing social attitudes. The participation of women at the decision-making level could have a great influence on organizations, and an attempt was under way to formulate a code of conduct which would guarantee respect for women and the promotion of their image in society.

15. She thanked the Committee for drawing her Government's attention to the inconsistency of providing more severe penalties for violence against married women than for violence against unmarried women. Those provisions were part of the pre-1960 Penal Code, and it was possible that they might originally have been motivated by the once-common practice of the abduction of young women by their lovers, with the women's cooperation, usually for the purpose of marriage. Her Government would study the situation to see whether the laws should be changed.

Article 6

16. With regard to the traffic in and exploitation of women, she referred the Committee to the Supplement for statistics on such crimes. The Government took the problem very seriously and was implementing strict measures to eliminate the traffic in women for purposes of prostitution. With regard to the question of whether the existing legal measures were effective, she said that the Government had taken steps which included limiting the number of visas issued to foreign cabaret and night club entertainers, in order to be sure that the recipients had been informed of the applicable national legislation and that their contracts

were acceptable to the authorities. Attempts were made to verify conditions of employment and investigate complaints. Unfortunately, such complaints were often withdrawn before action could be taken, or were subsequently repudiated by those who had made them. A new bill, currently before the House of Representatives, would regulate the professions of such entertainers, their agents and the owners of places of entertainment, and would require licensing of such establishments, their owners and their employees. Entertainers would be required to furnish evidence of a clean police record, and foreign nationals would receive copies of the applicable laws in their own language. Entertainers would be required to remain at their places of work until closing time and, thereafter, would be under no further obligation to their employers. If a woman filed a complaint, the police would be empowered to place her immediately in the care of the Department of Social Welfare Services, which would be reimbursed for her care by her employer at a rate no lower than her usual wages. The total number of licences issued to places of entertainment, and of visas issued to entertainers, would also be restricted. She noted that women who engaged in such work were generally from Asia or, in some cases, Eastern Europe. Between 1988 and 1992, the courts had heard 25 cases of trafficking in women, from which 20 convictions had resulted.

Article 8

17. Regarding women's participation in the diplomatic service, no specific measures had been introduced in respect of women diplomats, but they benefited from the same provisions as all other working women in terms of assistance in combining a career with family life. Those provisions included expanded child-care facilities, maternity leave and, most recently, the possibility of parental leave without pay, which applied only to civil servants. That reflected the Government's desire to act as a model for other employers. A few remaining discriminatory provisions in the conditions of service for diplomats, concerning matters such as rental subsidies and allowances, had recently been removed. A question had been asked about how many years' experience were required for a member of the diplomatic service to reach the rank of ambassador. The minimum number of years was 16 and was the same for both men and women.

Article 11

18. A considerable number of questions had been asked about the provisions of article 11, but many of them were answered in the Supplement. She was, however, able to provide certain additional information. In response to the query about child-care facilities, she said that the Department of Social Welfare Services was the official State agency for the provision and promotion of such services, and its policies were consistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With regard to incentives to industry to support the provision of child-care facilities, 50 per cent of the cost of constructing such facilities, and 30 per cent of the cost of furniture and equipment, were covered by government funding; that represented a substantial incentive.

19. Clarification had been requested regarding the achievement of equal pay for women. As the report pointed out, there had never been any discrimination in terms of pay or conditions of service in government jobs. Concerning measures to assist disabled women in their working lives, services for disabled persons,

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such as vocational guidance and training and financial assistance for self-employment and for setting up small businesses, were provided equally to disabled men and women.

20. Part-time work was not widespread in Cyprus, partly because of the very low unemployment rate which the country had enjoyed for many years, and partly because of the way in which the production process was structured. None the less, because of the current acute labour shortage, steps were being taken to encourage part-time employment in order to utilize human resources which would otherwise not be used; that situation affected women more than men. For statistical purposes, part-time workers were considered to be those working less than 30 hours per week. In 1992, part-time workers, mainly women, had constituted 5.5 per cent of all employed persons.

21. Referring to the question on the competitiveness of the textile industry, she said that only a minority of production units in that industry were competitive globally. Pay scales in the textile industry in Cyprus were very high and had prompted a number of companies to relocate to other countries. Retraining programmes had been organized for workers who had been made redundant as a result. The Government had succeeded in keeping the unemployment rate below 3 per cent for a number of years. On the whole, women had not suffered greatly from unemployment problems; there had been a movement of women workers towards the service industries, where they had made up about 60 per cent of the workforce in 1994, as compared to 40 per cent in 1985.

22. Additional data had been requested on cases of work-related illness and death. There had been very few such cases; two fatal industrial accidents involving women had been reported during the past year, one in the food industry and one in road construction. As to the right to work, it was recognized as a fundamental right for both men and women. It was one of the Government's main priorities to encourage more women to enter the labour market. The retirement age was 63 for both women and men. Women were very active in the trade union movement, which was very powerful in Cyprus, and the Government was encouraging women to participate even more in trade unions and to move up into decision-making posts.

23. On the philosophy underlying the new laws on equal pay, the Committee had rightly pointed out that the interpretation of those laws was very restrictive, despite the ratification by Cyprus of ILO Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, which called for a much broader interpretation. She noted that States which had ratified the ILO Convention were free to choose whether to implement it through legislation, regulations or collective agreement. It was her Government's policy that equal pay for work of equal value but of a different nature should be promoted by collective agreement. That was one of the most difficult parts of the ILO Convention to implement, and assistance had in fact been sought from the International Labour Organization, for example, in training Ministry of Labour personnel and trade union members. Consideration was being given to the establishment of an organization similar to the Equal Opportunities Commission in the United Kingdom, in order to facilitate the implementation of measures to achieve equal pay.

24. The problem of sexual harassment in the workplace had been discussed in Parliament and the Government had given consideration to ways of combating it. Women's organizations had been asked to submit their recommendations as to whether new laws were needed to tackle the problem, or whether it would be sufficient to amend the Penal Code. As a result, it had been decided that work should begin on a new law.

Article 12

25. A number of questions had been asked about health care. Medical treatment was provided free of charge to almost 75 per cent of the population, on a means-tested basis; it was financed by the Government and provided through State-owned hospitals and clinics. All forms of health care were covered, including the most elaborate and expensive surgery. There was no discrimination between women and men in that field. Questions had also been asked about the campaigns for early detection of cancer. The necessary additional information was provided in the Supplement. The campaigns had been very successful and had been universally welcomed by women's organizations. Clarification had been requested as to whether the figures for health care spending given in the report covered both private sector and public sector expenditure: only public sector health care expenditures had been included.

26. Regarding violence against women, a question had been asked about the reporting obligations of health care professionals. The victims of such violence were no longer obliged to report it directly to the authorities; they could do so through family counsellors, the police, welfare officers, the doctor who examined them, or in a number of other ways.

27. According to the Ministry of Health, contraceptives were used very widely in Cyprus. They were readily available from shops, kiosks and supermarkets, and were inexpensive. They were also sometimes provided free of charge in the context of sex education campaigns.

28. The main causes of death among women were cancer and heart problems. Statistics were available on the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and on other problems such as smoking. She would pass on those statistics to the Committee secretariat. Sex education in schools had existed in some form, since the 1960s. Under a new health education programme introduced in 1992, sex education was now compulsory and was incorporated in the teaching of the biological sciences and in certain cross curricular courses. The programme began in the fourth year of primary school. The school system in Cyprus was centralized and schools did not therefore enjoy autonomy as to the content and structure of curricula. Non-governmental organizations also provided lectures and educational materials on the subject of family planning. The term "sex education" was not actually used, since the subject was incorporated into a broader programme covering more general issues of relations between the sexes and psychological and social issues, including smoking and AIDS.

Article 14

29. Responding to the question on the number and amount of agricultural loans, she said that there were no legal barriers to women's ownership of land or property; 51.4 per cent of land in rural areas was owned by women, and they had equal access to credit opportunities. On the question of a special bank for women, there were currently no plans to establish such a bank. There were many rural credit-related associations in Cyprus which helped rural people in a number of ways including through the provision of loans, so that it was relatively easy for rural women to obtain credit when necessary. As to daily living and working conditions, rural women did of course work long hours; they were mostly occupied in crop and livestock production, whereas very few women were involved in forestry and fisheries. Women made up 45 per cent of the total population employed in agriculture; their role was all the more important because considerable numbers of men travelled to work in urban areas.

30. The importance of agriculture in Cyprus was gradually diminishing; it currently accounted for only 6.2 per cent of the gross domestic product, whereas in the past it had been the most important sector of the economy. The agricultural sector still provided employment for 35,000 persons, however, representing 12.2 per cent of the total economically active population.

31. Regarding the impact of business and tourism on the agricultural sector, she recalled that the tourist industry was very important for Cyprus. One positive development was that it was now possible for very poor people in isolated rural communities to obtain financing for the restoration of their homes for tourism purposes, or subsidies for the creation of small businesses. There was no discrimination against women in terms of who could benefit from such programmes. However, there was some concern that women might continue to find themselves in a subordinate position in such activities, despite the fact that their knowledge and experience made them highly qualified to engage in them. The Government was endeavouring to promote the establishment of women's cooperatives in rural areas, and a number of seminars had been held.

32. Women employed in the agricultural sector were covered fully by the social security system, except for self-employed women, who were not permitted to contribute to the system. The Government was aware that that situation was discriminatory and contrary to the laws of the European Union, and it intended to make the necessary changes in the very near future. The social pension scheme set up for women who had never had any other form of insurance and therefore were not entitled to any pension had mostly benefited housewives, but rural women were also covered and some of them had already benefited from the scheme. The social pension was financed by the Government and required no contributions from potential recipients.

Article 16

33. With regard to the government campaign to publicize the new Family Law, especially among women, she said that when meetings were held in rural areas, the major issues covered, in very simplified form, were family law, the legislation on employment and the protection of maternity, the social pension scheme and violence against women. The Minister himself was usually present at

such meetings in order to stress the importance of legal awareness among women, and men were encouraged to participate.

34. She had already indicated that there was no general scheme to provide legal aid to women; however, the Bar Association had a special fund to assist poor women, and some women's organizations also provided support to their members.

35. Her Government had not organized any special training in the new legislation for judges and family court officers; however, judges had been the first to identify the unfair treatment of women under the old law and to press for reform, and judges of the Supreme Court and other judges had been members of the committees established to prepare the new law. Efforts were being made to provide training to other officials through the Police Academy; lectures were given on the law concerning violence against women, so as to sensitize the police to that issue.

36. On the subject of maintenance, as indicated in paragraph 478 of the report, the law laid down specific requirements for entitlement to maintenance following separation or divorce. The new legislation introduced maintenance for the first time; prior to that, women had only been able to obtain child support, even if they had no source of income. Provision had been made for the award of maintenance for reasons of clemency, so as to enable the courts to take all circumstances into account and make a fair determination.

37. There were no provisions in the legal system for common law marriages. Children of such unions were considered to have been born out of wedlock and to be in the care of the mother.

38. On the question of why special family courts had been established for religious groups, she said that those courts had been established in accordance with article 111 of the Constitution, which gave minorities and religious groups the freedom to decide on matters having to do with family relations. The purpose of the legislation was to protect the identity of those groups, and for that reason the Greek Orthodox Church, Turkish Cypriots and also Armenians, Latins and Maronites were allowed to have their own family courts. The law had been prepared in close cooperation with those groups, which had been anxiously awaiting the establishment of the special courts.

39. The grounds for divorce were those laid down by the Church; article 111 of the Constitution added another ground, the complete breakdown of relations between the spouses, reflecting the new idea that if the spouses found living together unbearable they should be able to get a divorce.

40. Under the new law, after the breakdown of marriage, each spouse could claim a share of the matrimonial property proportional to his or her contribution to the increase in that property. If one spouse was unable to provide evidence of any such contribution, he or she was still entitled to one third of the property. A crucial new provision was that housework and child-rearing were now considered a contribution to marital property, along with care for the elderly and support for the partner.

41. The age of marriage was 18 years for both boys and girls. Although the Church allowed girls to marry at the age of 16, such marriages were not in conformity with civil law.

42. On the question of whether people were free to choose between civil and ecclesiastical courts, she said that the State recognized only the civil courts and did not recognize divorce by ecclesiastical courts. At the same time, the Church did not recognize divorce by civil courts. Those wanting to remarry through the Church had to go through both the civil and ecclesiastical courts.

43. The CHAIRPERSON expressed appreciation for the exhaustive replies provided by the representative of Cyprus, which gave a clear picture of the situation of women in Cyprus. She commended the steps taken to promote the participation of women in the decision-making process and requested additional information about efforts to eliminate violence against women. The problem of trafficking in women was clearly significant because of the country's geographical location; she suggested that, in addition to police efforts, such traffic should be combated through education. The new law on sexual harassment was a step forward and could help to break down some of the barriers and traditional attitudes to women.

44. She recommended that the Government of Cyprus should look carefully at the Convention and at the Committee's general recommendations and concluding comments, and expressed the hope that the next report would reflect even more progress in the status of women in Cypriot society.

45. Ms. VARNAVIDOU (Cyprus) assured the Committee that her Government would take careful note of its recommendations.

46. Ms. Varnavidou (Cyprus) withdrew.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

47. The CHAIRPERSON said that it might be necessary to accelerate the work of the Working Groups, for example by setting up drafting groups to assist them.

48. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that, in the past, several experts had noted that the Committee had overburdened itself with work; at the current session, there had been more time to consider reports in depth, and that had benefited the constructive dialogue that was the Committee's main mandate. If the Working Groups were unable to complete the drafting of recommendations or new rules of procedure, she felt that their work should not be rushed. The Committee's recommendations were taken very seriously within the United Nations.

49. A procedural discussion followed, in which Ms. ABAKA, Ms. AOUIJ, Ms. BUSTELO DEL GARCIA REAL, Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS, Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE, Ms. HARTONO, Ms. SATO, Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING and the CHAIRPERSON took part.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.